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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, November 8, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HERE AND THERE WITH THE FOOD AND DRUG INSPECTORS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The new year should begin in the Fall, I've always thought. That's much more definitely a time of change than January first. School and college terms begin. We housekeepers are checking over the repairs and refurbishing of the family wardrobes, seeing to the heating plant, getting in a general fall cleaning as we go along.

I'm afraid I can't alter the calendar. But after reading our Washington correspondent's latest letter about the activities of the Food and Drug Administration at this time of year, I have concluded that the federal Food and Drug inspectors are also conducting a sort of miscellaneous check-up on a national scale, that corresponds roughly to our home fall housecleaning and preparations for the winter ahead.

Our correspondent writes: "Of course certain routine work goes on in the Food and Drug family all the time. At some seasons, however, there's more of one type of investigation to be done than at other times. To illustrate -- in the spring when floods are prevalent, flood damaged goods claim attention. When fishing grounds are busy, food inspectors are sure to be busy, also. September's letter 'R', and other factors, focus official eyes on oyster fisheries. And so it goes.

"At this season of the year, canning operations are closing up everywhere. Inspectors are systematically visiting canneries to check up on the equipment and its condition, and the quality of the material going into cans. These men are especially trained in the technique of inspecting each kind of cannery, whether peas, tomatoes, other vegetables, or fruits, are put up. Fish and mixtures also come in for attention.

"As an example: One of the requirements for canned peas is that the product shall be practically free of foreign material. In certain districts where peas for canning are grown, there is a common weed with seeds almost the same size as peas. These inedible seeds may be harvested along with the peas. If the canner is not getting them out of his stock, the inspector will have something to report on the subject.

"At tomato canneries the inspectors have been watching the character of the raw material delivered to the plant, noting whether the good tomatoes can be easily separated from the bad, and how efficiently the product is trimmed where necessary. These canneries should be equipped with slow moving belts on which the raw tomatoes are sorted as they pass before the operators. The lighting must be adequate. The equipment must be easily cleanable. In general, the condition of any cannery and the procedures followed in it must be such that the product will be clean and wholesome.

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"Cannery inspection enables the federal inspectors to distinguish the establishments that follow good practice from those which are slovenly. Inspectors at the various shipping centers are busy sampling the summer's output of canned foods that have entered into interstate commerce. A tip that inferior goods have left a particular cannery, or that the conditions under which a certain food was packed were objectionable, directs the attention of the sampling force to possible violators of the Federal food law.

"Just now, Seattle Food and Drug inspectors are sampling canned salmon from Alaska. They cannot possibly examine every shipment in its entirety. They give particular attention to certain lots shipped from canneries where conditions discovered during inspection indicated that partially spoiled fish may have been canned.

"Your listeners will be interested to know, by the way, that examination of this year's salmon output so far received from Alaska shows marked improvement over last year's conditions. Perhaps the weather had something to do with this. During the period of the heaviest salmon catches, the weather in Alaska was cool and ideal for retarding or preventing spoilage between the time the fish were caught and when it was finally packed.

"Part of the training for examiners of canned salmon, tuna, and allied fish, consists of actually packing and canning fish in various stages of decomposition, as well as in prime condition. When these samples are opened and examined, the inspector's "nose knows" bad canned fish instantly, and enables him to spot any commercial lots resembling his own experimental canning.

"This is also the season when the federal courts have reconvened. Inspectors in the main jurisdictions are visiting witnesses and preparing evidence if they have cases of violation coming up. These may concern such widely varied products as jams and preserves, imitation olive oil, sub-standard butter, or candy manufactured in a filthy plant.

"The Federal Food and Drug force is constantly working with the different State and city food and drug officials. They are interested in local efforts and achievements, especially as these often have a bearing on situations arising in interstate commerce. They assisted recently with a survey of the traffic in foodstuffs that is trucked into and out of New York City. This is one of the most difficult types of food distribution to control. The trucks are on the roads chiefly at night. Many of the companies keep very sketchy and inadequate records of shipments. The survey showed that there are from eight to ten thousand companies operating small fleets of one to five trucks, bringing in fresh vegetables and fruits to feed New York's millions. There are even a few large fleets of a hundred or more trucks. While most of these concerns cooperate with the federal authorities, on the whole, there are always a few that try to baffle inspectors because in some way their business is illegal.

"Time prevents my telling you of other interesting instances of the cordial cooperation between the Federal and State food and drug forces. Next time I hope to write you some further details of the nation-wide hunt and capture of the dangerous preparation called 'elixir of sulfanilamid' of which I wrote last time."

That's all of our Washington letter today.
